

Compassion for Congo Benefit Dinner

It is a great privilege for me to speak with you this evening. It was 2 years ago that a Pastor from Congo who you just saw in pictures, Didier, came to our church and changed my families' life. As this brother in Christ shared with our church for 15 minutes, about his ministry in Congo and his heart to help abandoned children, many of whom will not make it to school-age, as he talked about orphans and the orphanage he hoped to open in 2011, God began a work in our hearts and in others to bring these beautiful children here. We went through some difficult events as a family, as many of you know, in the death of our first adopted son from Congo ... but God is so gracious and so good, and in the death of His own son, Jesus, God has brought many sons and daughters into His spiritual family and God is merciful to use us in His gospel purposes for His glory.

The amazing ways God worked to bring Matteus into our family:

- Jaime had been praying when I went the first time to Congo with the Wilmarths that God would put a child in my arms before I left, and God literally did, 2 days before I left DRC and I was able to start the legal adoption process right away
- Less than one month later Jaime was in Congo with me and Matteus was sitting on her lap in Papa Didier's "moto-car"!
- God had graciously provided through the generosity of His people gifts to cover all our airfare the week we had to buy return tickets and Jaime's expedited passport literally arrived the day before we had to leave and we were in DRC
- The court costs to adopt had gone up thousands of dollars since our first adoption but God provided for that as well
- Exactly one month after I met Matteus he was legally our son in the Congolese court, an amazing thing on multiple levels: 1) usually the process takes 3 months before they're even adoptable, and 2) the court system was on strike for the rest of the year, but the judge who met me the first time I came arranged a special court hearing just for us to adopt!
- I had to travel to the capitol city of Congo by myself with Matteus, some of the scariest 10 days of my life, to get his passport and VISA and complete the adoption with the US embassy, in an evil city where no one speaks English and many want to steal or take advantage of this tall foreigner who stands out. My parents shared an email to supporters the week before we left, and some missionaries who knew them offered their help to me last minute, were life-savers!

- God worked wonder after wonder in my time in Congo to put everything in order in just the right time by His mercy
- I literally wrote dozens of pages of praises on my blog and we could be here all night just hitting the highlights, but I sum it up this way one blog: we have a Mountain-Moving Miracle-Working Red-Sea-Dividing All-Providing God
- We don't have all night, but I do want to share briefly:
 1. God's Heart for Africa
 2. God's Heart for Orphans
 3. Adoption is the Heart of the Gospel

1. GOD'S HEART FOR AFRICA

- It's been neat for me to study my family history and the heart for Africa my great-grandfather had. His dad grew up in the days of slavery in Kentucky, but God moved in his son's heart thru the gospel to later want to give his life and risk his life to bring the gospel to black Africans in Congo as a missionary there in 1900s (great aunt born in Congo)
- It's also been neat for me in the last year and a half to read of my Heavenly Father's heart for Africa, and how much God's Word has to say about Africans, and how many came to true faith on that continent in Bible times and also how in modern times in the last 100 years more people in Africa have come to Christ than there are human beings in the United States. One of the greatest explosions of growth in Christianity in human history is taking place right now on the African continent. The OT prophesied of African nations by name that would bow to Christ in large numbers
- The continent we call Africa today, Scripture has much to say about. In Genesis 48, Jacob, adopts 2 African-born sons into the 12 Tribes (Joseph's wife was from On in Africa) so some of Israel's Tribes had were at least part African
- Israel's great leader Moses, was also adopted, and was used by God to bring His people out of Egypt's kingdom in Northeast Africa, and it says in Exodus 12 that there was a mixed multitude, people from other African countries like Cush (modern Sudan) who worshipped and left with Israel
- Moses in Numbers 12 marries one from Cush (Sudan) and God defends and commends that marriage in that passage
- The land of Cush in heart of Africa appears in the OT about as many times in the OT as the land of Canaan in the Pentateuch, which is where Canaan's land is repeatedly promised to Israel, but many have never heard of Cush

- God tells Amos He views Cushites the same as the Jews
- These Africans had close, friendly relations with Hezekiah,
- An African in Jeremiah's day proves to be a true believer in the true Lord, at a time when few of the Jewish people were
- Jesus lived in NE Africa before living in Nazareth (Mt 2)
- A man from Cyrene in Africa helps Jesus carry His cross
- In the book of Acts before the gospel goes to the Greeks or Samaritans or, God sends the gospel to an Ethiopian on his way back to his continent and country, who is saved
- In the place where believers were first called Christians, one of the first church leaders is apparently a black African

I could preach a whole sermon on this (in fact I did, and to study it further, you can get the notes and verses on our church website)...

2. GOD'S HEART FOR ORPHANS

God has a special place in His heart for orphans, and the fatherless. Hosea 14:3 says to God "*In you the orphan finds mercy ...*" That's a great verse in light of the ministry name 'Compassion for Congo'

40x in the OT we read of God's compassion for fatherless/orphans, along with the strangers or foreigners among God's people. The idea of fatherless and foreigners or aliens being welcomed into the homes of God's people is not a new idea ... it goes back to the OT and is in God's Law for the fatherless or the foreigner or alien who is staying in your home, in your gates (even in 10 Commandments)

Dt 10:18 *He defends the cause of the fatherless ... and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those ...*

Ps 146:9 (NIV) *The LORD watches over the alien [i.e., foreigner living among God's people] and sustains the fatherless ...*

Lev 19:34 *The foreigner who resides with you must be to you like a native[born] among you; so you must love him as yourself...* (NET)

James 1:27 (NET) "*Pure and undefiled religion before **God the Father** is this: to care for orphans ...*"

God expresses His care to the fatherless in various ways:

Psalm 68:5-6 (NASB) *A Father of the fatherless ... Is God in His holy habitation. God makes a home for the lonely...*[NET version:] *God settles those who have been deserted in their own homes ...*

3. ADOPTION IS THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL

Paul's gospel summary in Galatians 4 is based on human adoption:
⁴ *But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law,* ⁵ *so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.* ⁶ *Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"* ⁷ *Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir ...*

John Piper writes in comparison to human adoption: 'God's cost to adopt us was infinitely greater than any cost we endure in adopting and raising children ... [in earthly adoption there is legal red tape involved, but our heavenly adoption involved red blood, life for life, legally required by God's law] Jesus satisfied all the legal demands precisely by shedding his blood ... The distance between what we are, and what God is, is infinitely greater than any distance between us and a child we might adopt. God crossed the greatest cultural barrier to redeem and adopt us...God does not leave us as [foreigners] when he adopts us. He does not leave us without feelings of acceptance and love. Rather, he pours his Spirit into our hearts to give us the experience of being embraced in the family ... In adopting us, God gives us the very Spirit of his Son'¹

There are gospel parallels with physical and spiritual adoption:

- I told my son the words of John 14:18 (cf. 1:12, 20:17)
- Matteus entered a whole new world and new life, where old things have passed away, and where new things have come
- He has a new name and a new father who brought him to his new family, a new community of loving believers
- a new city with new sights, a new citizenship, a new house
- new clothes for him to wear as we took off and laid aside the old and put on the new every day
- his face has a whole new demeanor from the guy I met
- he has new language, new speech, new habits developing

After he'd been here awhile Ray greeted Matteus in both French then Swahili. Matteus replied in English: "I wanna ride my bike!" I have a picture of the gospel in front of me every day, the gospel that makes us a new person, old things passed away, new come. In Christ we have a new citizenship, community, house, family. Our *New Testament* tells us of blessings to God's adopted children:

- our new Father also gives us a new name (Rev. 2:17, 3:12)

- new city and citizenship: heaven (Phil 3:20, Heb 12:22)
- a new heart-cry to our new *Abba/Father* (or *Papa*, Gal. 4:6)

When Paul celebrates the gospel in Eph 1, adoption is at the heart:
³ *Blessed be the God and Father ... In love* ⁵ *He* [the Father]
predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself

...

2:13 *But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near ... ¹⁸for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father ...we are members of His household.*

In a greater way than any human father going to a far off land to bring near a son to himself in adoption, God the Father came to us who were far off and has brought us near in His Spirit, through His Son, to make us sons forever with full access, acceptance, affection and attention always before the Almighty King who is our *Abba*.

John Newton, author of *Amazing Grace*, was most amazed by the doctrine of adoption, and he called it “greatest of all God’s works”

Wayne Grudem, author of most widely used Systematic Theology book, says that adoption may be salvation’s greatest blessing of all.

I came across this quote this week by one of the most influential books and theologians of the 20th century, J.I. Packer in *Knowing God*: ‘Our understanding of Christianity cannot be better than our grasp of adoption ... [it is] in a sense the climax of the Bible ... Adoption ... is the highest privilege that the gospel offers’²

Joel Beeke has a whole book on what our spiritual forefathers said about spiritual adoption and sums it up as “our greatest privilege”³

In church history, many Christians, especially those who knew the doctrines of grace, loved adoption and cared for literal orphans. It was men like Newton and Mueller and Spurgeon and many others.

Packer says in the doctrine of God becoming our adoptive Father ‘you can sum up the whole of New Testament religion ... If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God’s child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all.’⁴

Romans 8:1 *Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus ...*¹⁵ *For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!”*¹⁶ *The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God,*¹⁷ *and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ ...* [and v. 29 later explains God is conforming us more and more] *to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren ...*³¹ *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?*³² *He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? ...*³⁵ *Who will separate us from the love of Christ? ...*

Adoption is judicially secured by the Judge of the Universe and our Attorney has never lost a case and never lost a child. Man does not have veto power to override God’s supreme court, and the accuser of the brethren cannot condemn, because the penalty has been paid in full and the Judge has brought down the gavel, not only declaring us righteous, but declaring us His sons with Jesus and it is an inseparable irreversible irrevocable verdict forever.

³⁸ *For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,*³⁹ *nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Adoption is one way to apply the gospel (Matt 28:19). Adoption is a platform to talk about the gospel, God’s adoption of us (Eph 2:3).

God’s adopted multi-ethnic family is His eternal purpose that we see promised in Genesis 12:3 and that we see previewed on earth in families or church families and it’s a reality we see powerfully displayed around the throne of Jesus in heaven (Revelation 7).

And we’ve seen a wonderful preview of that here tonight, Amen?

¹ John Piper, “Adoption: The Heart of the Gospel,” in *Reclaiming Adoption* (Cruciform Press, 2011), p. 97-103.

² J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, chapter 19.

³ Joel Beeke, *Joint Heirs with Christ: The Puritans on Adoption*; see also his www.sermonaudio.com message “Adoption: Our Greatest Privilege”

⁴ Packer, *Evangelical Magazine* 7, pp. 19-20